



Giacomo Puccini

Il Trittico

Il Tabarro

Suor Angelica

Gianni Schicchi



Welcome!

The State Theatre is proud to present *It Trittico*, Giacomo Puccini's trio of one-act operas. Recorded live at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden this HD presentation captures all the excitement of the live event.

This *Keynotes* performance guide has been created by the State Theatre Education Department to add to your understanding and enjoyment of the opera. We hope it will encourage you to take advantage of our other HD opera offerings this season.

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Keynotes

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Puccini's trilogy of contrasting one-act operas was a long time in the making. The concept occurred to him around 1900, but it took the composer many years—and many detours and false starts—for all the pieces to fall into place.

In Paris, in 1912, he found the first part of his triptych: Didier Gold's gruesome one-act play *La Houppelande* (*The Cloak* in English, *Il tabarro* in Italian). Captivated by the play's gritty, realistic details and dark atmosphere, Puccini started setting it to music in 1913; but without ideas for the other two parts of his trilogy, he turned to other projects. He resumed work on *Il tabarro* two years later. After much delay and difficulty finding a suitable collaborator, Puccini turned to Giuseppe Adami, who finished the libretto in just two weeks.

For the remaining two operas, Puccini searched far and wide for subjects, and considered a long list of collaborators. Finally, playwright Giovacchino Forzano suggested pairing *Il tabarro* with a tragedy and a comedy. The tragedy, *Suor Angelica*, was an original story by Forzano. The subject was new, and the all-female cast made it unique in the opera world. (As research, Puccini visited his sister Iginia, who was Mother Superior at the Convent of Vicopelago. When the composer played the finished score for the sisters, there wasn't a dry eye in the house.)

The last opera in the triptych, *Gianni Schicchi*, marked Puccini's one and only foray into comedy. No one knows whether it was the composer or the librettist who hit on the idea of adapting a character from Dante's *Inferno* into a comic opera, but when Puccini received Forzano's libretto, he was so excited that he immediately stopped work on *Suor Angelica* and began setting the comedy. The character of Gianni Schicchi appears only briefly in *The Inferno*; the opera was actually based on an anonymous 1866 commentary on the *Divine Comedy* that explains how Schicchi cleverly defrauded the rich Donati family out of their inheritance.

The premiere of *Il trittico*, originally slated for Rome, was held up by World War I. The premiere took place instead at the Metropolitan Opera, on December 14, 1918. Though the armistice had been signed, transatlantic travel was still dangerous, and so Puccini was unable to be present.

Puccini always meant for his three one-acts to be performed together, but as time wore on they were increasingly performed separately, often paired with one-act operas by other composers. *Gianni Schicchi*, hailed as a masterpiece from the moment of its premiere, became the most popular. *Il Tabarro* is also frequently excerpted; *Suor Angelica*, the composer's favorite, is the most often overlooked of the trilogy. As a whole, *Il trittico* showcases Puccini's unique gifts: a knack for lean storytelling, the ability to create atmospheric musical universes, and the flexibility to conjure up shock, tears, and uproarious laughter.

Take note...

- *Il trittico* has not been presented in full by The Royal Opera since 1965. Director Richard Jones has created new productions of *Il tabarro* and *Suor Angelica* to his already popular production of *Gianni Schicchi*.



Cast & Credits

Music: Giacomo Puccini
Libretto: Giuseppe Adami (*Il Tabarro*)
Giovacchino Forzano (*Suor Angelica, Gianni Schicchi*)

Royal Opera House Chorus
Orchestra of the Royal Opera House
Antonio Pappano, Conductor



Il Tabarro

Michele Lucio Gallo
Giorgetta.....Eva-Maria Westbroek
LuigiAleksandrs Antonenko
TincaAlan Oke
TalpaJeremy White
Song Seller.....Ji-Min Park
FrugolaIrina Mishura
Lovers.....Anna Devin
Robert Anthony Gardiner

Set designs.....Ultz
Costume design.....Nicky Gillibrand
Lighting designD M Wood
Movement DirectorSarah Fahie



Suor Angelica

Sister AngelicaErmonela Jaho
The Princess.....Anna Larsson
The AbbessIrina Mishura
The Monitress.....Elena Zilio
Mistress of the NovicesElizabeth Sikora
Sister GenovieffaAnna Devin
Nursing SisterElizabeth Woollett
Alms SistersGillian Webster
Kathleen Wilder
Sister OsminaEryl Royle
Sister DolcinaElizabeth Key
NoviceKaty Batho
Lay Sisters.....Melissa Alder
Kate McCarney

Set designs.....Miriam Buether
Costume designs.....Nicky Gillibrand
Lighting designD M Wood
Movement DirectorSarah Fahie



Gianni Schicchi

Gianni Schicchi Lucio Gallo
LaurettaEkaterina Siurina
Rinuccio.....Francesco Demuro
ZitaElena Zilio
Gherardo.....Alan Oke
NellaRebecca Evans
Betto di Signa.....Jeremy White
Simone.....Gwynne Howell
Marco.....Robert Poulton
La Ciesca.....Marie McLaughlin
Maestro SpinelloccioHenry Waddington
Ser Amantio di Nicolao.....Enrico Fissore
PinellinoDaniel Grice
GuccioJohn Molloy

Set designs.....John Macfarlane
Costume designs.....Nicky Gillibrand
Original lighting designMimi Jordan Sherin
Lighting revived by.....D M Wood
Choreography.....Lucy Burge
Revival ChoreographerSarah Fahie



The Story

On the banks of the Seine in Paris, Michele sits on his barge, watching the beautiful sunset while the longshoremen, backs bent under heavy bags, unload his cargo. His wife, Giorgetta, who is half his age, comes on deck and busies herself with household chores. Michele tenderly kisses her, but she turns her face away. Disappointed, he goes down into the hold.

Giorgetta serves wine to the three longshoremen: Luigi, Tinca and Talpa. To the music of a passing organ grinder, Tinca begins to dance with Giorgetta, but is soon replaced by Luigi. They dance together in a tight embrace, stopping abruptly when Michele returns on deck. The dockhands go back to their work.

A song seller is heard in the distance as Michele tells his wife that Tinca, Talpa, and Luigi will be coming along when they set sail next week. Giorgetta asks him what seems to be troubling him lately; she says she would prefer bruises and rough handling to his cold silence. Michele insists that nothing is bothering him.

Talpa's wife, Frugola, comes to take him home. Michele greets her, then goes into the cabin. Frugola shows off the bric-a-brac she has collected on her daily rounds. As the workday ends, Tinca says he will go drown his troubles in drink; Luigi concurs bitterly that this is the only way to cope with their bleak existence. Frugola tells of her dream of a little house in the country, while Giorgetta expresses a longing to leave her rootless life on the barge and return to the Parisian suburb where she grew up. She and Luigi, who comes from the same place, reminisce about the beauty of their town.

Frugola and Talpa depart. Luigi and Giorgetta are left alone; it becomes clear that they are lovers. When Michele appears on deck, Luigi asks to leave the barge when they reach Rouen. Michele convinces him to stay, insisting that there's no work to be had in Rouen. He returns to the cabin.

Luigi tells Giorgetta that he wants to leave the barge because he cannot bear not to have her for himself. In hurried whispers, they arrange to meet later that evening. Giorgetta will leave the gangplank in place and light a match to signal when Michele has gone to sleep. Her lover departs.

Michele reappears on deck. Sensing Giorgetta's restless unhappiness, he tries to rekindle their love by recalling happier days before the death of their baby, when he would enfold her and the child in his old cloak. Giorgetta rebuffs him, then departs.

Alone, Michele muses over his suspicion that Giorgetta is in love with another man, though he can't figure out who it is. He swears to kill the man if and when he does find out. He settles down and lights his pipe. Luigi, who has been waiting in the shadows, mistakes the light for Giorgetta's signal. He rushes aboard. Michele seizes him and forces him to confess his love for Giorgetta. He strangles him and conceals the body in the folds of his cloak. Giorgetta comes on deck to apologize to Michele. To her horror, he throws open his cloak to reveal Luigi's lifeless body.

Take note...



- The names of the three main characters are pronounced mee-KAY-lay, jor-JET-ta, and LWEE-jee.
- The visual design of this production might make you think of film noir. The setting has been moved forward a few decades from the opera's early-20th-century timeframe. (Among the small changes, the organ grinder indicated in the score has been replaced by a record player.)

Suor Angelica



The Story

Sister Angelica and two lay sisters are late for chapel. The Monitor chides them for not doing penance, as Sister Angelica has done. Some of the sisters confess they still long for worldly pleasures—Sister Genovieffa for the lambs she used to tend and Sister Dolcina for sweet things to eat. Sister Angelica denies she has any such desires, but the others know she desperately longs for some word from her family. For seven years she has heard nothing from them, and the sisters speculate that she was a princess, banished to the convent for reasons they have been unable to discover.

Alms collectors arrive, distributing the food they have gathered. One of them mentions that a magnificent coach bearing a visitor stands outside the convent gate. Angelica is startled and, with increasing anxiety, asks her to describe the coach in detail. A bell rings announcing the visitor. The Abbess enters and tells Angelica that her aunt, the Princess, has come to see her.

Approaching, the Princess rejects Angelica's gestures of affection. The Princess explains that when Angelica's parents died, she was made guardian of both Angelica and her sister, Anna Viola, and was given control over their inheritance. Anna Viola is to be married and the Princess demands that Angelica sign over her share to her sister. Having brought disgrace on the family name, the Princess declares, Angelica is no longer entitled to any part of the inheritance. Crushed by her aunt's cruelty, Angelica swears she has repented. She cannot, however, erase the memory of her little son, who, she learns, died two years ago. Her will now broken, Angelica sobs and signs the document. The Princess withdraws.

Angelica grieves that her son died without his mother by his side. Resolving to join her child in heaven, she drinks poison. She is then struck by the reality of what she has done and prays for salvation. A celestial choir is heard and Angelica sees a vision of the Blessed Virgin with her child.

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Take note...



- The name of the title character is pronounced SWOR ahn-JELL-ee-ca.
- Rather than the usual setting—an Italian convent in the late 17th century—director Richard Jones places this production in a children's infirmary, sometime during the 20th century.
- The showstopper in this opera is the aria, "Senza mamma, o bimbo" ("Without mama, o little baby"), where she grieves for her dead child and longs for the day when they will be reunited in heaven.
- The other famous opera featuring nuns is *The Dialogues of the Carmelites* (1957), by François Poulenc. That one doesn't end happily, either.





The Story

The wealthy Buoso Donati has just died. His greedy relatives gather at his bedside to mourn his passing and to search for a will. There are rumors that the old man has left nearly everything to a monastery. Young Rinuccio finds the will and makes his Aunt Zita promise to let him marry his sweetheart Lauretta if they inherit enough money. The will reveals that the rumors were true; now the relatives shed genuine tears.

Rinuccio suggests that Lauretta's father, Gianni Schicchi, a shrewd self-made man, might be able to help them. When Schicchi arrives with Lauretta, he is disgusted by the hypocrisy and avarice of the aristocratic family. He decides to leave, but when Lauretta informs him that she plans to marry Rinuccio, he agrees to stay and help.

Schicchi establishes that no one but those present knows that Buoso has died. He has them remove the body. Suddenly, the doctor arrives to check on his ailing patient, Buoso; from behind a curtain, Schicchi imitates the old man's voice and assures the doctor that his health is improving. The doctor leaves.

Schicchi instructs the relatives to summon the notary. Donning Buoso's nightshirt and cap, he promises to dictate a new will. Each of the relatives tries to bribe Schicchi to leave the best parts of the estate to them: specifically, the house, the mills at Signa, and the mule. Schicchi agrees to grant every one of these secret requests. At the same time, he ominously reminds the family of the punishment for those found to have falsified a will—banishment, and the amputation of a hand.

The notary and witnesses arrive. Schicchi, pretending to be Buoso, dictates that the bulk of the estate—including the house, the mill, and the mule—are to go to his dear friend, Gianni Schicchi. The relatives are furious, but must remain silent lest they betray their guilt. When the notary leaves they loot the house, grabbing anything they can get their hands on until Schicchi chases them out.

Lauretta and Rinuccio oblivious to the frantic goings-on, tenderly recall their first kiss. Gazing at the young lovers, Schicchi turns to the audience: "Tell me, ladies and gentlemen, whether Buoso's money could end up better than this? For this bit of fun, they stuck me in hell...and so be it. But with the permission of the great father Dante, if this evening you've been amused, grant me 'extenuating circumstances.'"

Take note...



- The name of the title character is pronounced JAH-nee SKEE-kee.
- While the original story of *Gianni Schicchi* takes place in 13th-century Florence the Royal Opera's production updates the action to modern times.
- In Canto XXX of Dante's *Inferno*, Gianni Schicchi is encountered in the eighth circle of hell, where he is observed "running in the way that a boar does when he breaks loose from the sty," and sticking his teeth into someone's neck and dragging him across the hard ground.
- Lauretta's aria, "O mio babbino caro," is not only the best-known tune in *Il trittico*, it's also a media favorite, having been used to advertise everything from spaghetti sauce to video games, and as background music for countless films—most notably, *Room with a View*.

Meet the Composer



“Almighty God touched me with his little finger and said to me: ‘Write for the theater. Remember, only for the theater.’ And I have obeyed that supreme commandment.”

Giacomo Puccini was born on December 22, 1858 in Lucca, Italy, into a long line of church composers and organists. The expectation was that he would follow the family tradition. At 14 he became a church organist. By 16, he was composing religious music and beginning studies at a local conservatory.

His life changed on a night in 1876, when he and a friend walked 13 miles to Pisa to see a performance of Verdi’s *Aida*. From that moment, his sole ambition was to write opera. Upon graduation from the Milan Conservatory, he entered a competition for one-act operas. His entry, *Le villi*, didn’t win even an honorable mention, but it was an international success. (It is very rarely performed today.)

Manon Lescaut (1893) is the composer’s earliest work to endure in the standard repertoire. His next three operas are his most celebrated: *La bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), and *Madama Butterfly* (1904). Subsequent works, though less frequently produced, are of very high quality: *La fanciulla del West* (1910), *La rondine* (1917), *Il trittico* (1918), and *Turandot*.

Puccini’s operas combine great stories, intense emotion, memorable characters, sweeping melodies, and exquisite harmonic coloration. The composer took great pains in the entire creative process, from finding the perfect subjects for his operas to demanding countless rewrites from his librettists (and, if he was still not satisfied, writing the text himself). He traveled extensively to supervise productions of his operas, making sure they met his exacting standards. He made some fortuitous discoveries while attending the theater

abroad—for example, *Madame Butterfly* in London and *The Girl of the Golden West* in New York. The composer explored all sorts of music—traditional Chinese music for *Turandot*, American folksongs for *La fanciulla del West*, Viennese waltzes for *La rondine*—looking for details to help him create a distinct sonic atmosphere for each opera.

The composer had an interesting, if complicated, personal life. During his student days in Milan, he fathered a child with Elvira Gemignani, a married woman. (They were married in 1904, following her husband’s death.) Puccini was a notorious philanderer; his wife a jealous woman. Suspecting him of carrying on an affair with their 21-year-old servant, Elvira drove the young woman to suicide. (An autopsy revealed that the girl had been a virgin.) The scandal caused a sensation in the press. Puccini was forced to compensate the girl’s family to prevent Elvira from going to jail.

Besides attractive women, Puccini’s passions included hunting, smoking, mechanical devices of any kind, fast cars, and buying houses. His love for speed caused a near-fatal automobile accident just months before the Milan premiere of *Madama Butterfly*. It was smoking, however, that ultimately led to his death. On November 29, 1924, while in a Belgian hospital undergoing experimental radiation treatment for throat cancer, he suffered a fatal heart attack. At the time of his death, his last opera, *Turandot*, remained unfinished. Composer Franco Alfano was commissioned to complete the score.